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Documents disclose CIA research

Agency financed covert studies in '50s and '60s

By JIM SCHACHTER

Agents of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) directed research projects at Columbia during the 1950's and '60's. Studies, previously undisclosed, were both covertly and openly funded by the CIA as recently as 1969. Supposedly independent organizations, including the National Science Foundation, were used as fronts for CIA financing of research. CIA employees have taken courses at Columbia—and may still.

These revelations and others, which call into question the integrity of current as well as former Columbia faculty members and administrators shed new light on the CIA's operations during its formative years. They are culled from thousands of CIA and Columbia documents released to Spectator under terms of the federal Freedom of Information Act.

The documents—accounting records, correspondence, research contracts and internal CIA memoranda—were obtained as part of an ongoing, two-and-a-half year legal action. They tell of an intelligence agency seeking to exploit the expertise of a leading university; of a university willing to shoulder its patriotic duty as it sought funding for its teachers' and students' research; and of a time before the initials "CIA" automatically cast doubt on the propriety of an academic enterprise.

All CIA-sponsored activities at Columbia, the documents suggest, were apparently harmless. If the files tell the complete story of the university's relationships with the Agency, then no Columbia professors engaged in the "mind-control" drug testing experiments that raised furors on other campuses when they were disclosed in 1977. None of the Columbia studies,

it appears, used or produced classified materials.

But frequently, the researchers—both students and teachers—were unaware of the source of the studies' funding, and when the researchers knew of CIA support, it seems, they often kept university administrators and faculty colleagues unaware of their relationships with the agency.

On two occasions, employees of the CIA worked at the university as directors of CIA-financed projects. From 1956 until 1969, Thad Alton, an economist, headed a study of "The National Income and Product of Soviet and Satellite Economies," which was located in the School of International Affairs. CIA association with the study of Eastern European post-war economies was classified until 1967, when Columbia, with the CIA's permission, confirmed the sponsorship after it was alleged by the Students for a Democratic Society.

But even then, the university may not have known that the project "was under Agency control and headed by an Agency employee," as one CIA Office of Logistics memorandum states.

Warren Goodell, an educational consultant who in 1967 was associate director of Columbia's office of Projects and Grants, said administrators "had heard some stories" about Alton being a CIA employee. The stories, however, were never confirmed, Goodell recalled, and administrators assumed the project was directed by Alton and Schuyler Wallace, then dean of SIA. (Wallace died in 1974.)

Alton continued to direct the project after it was transferred in 1969 to the Riverside Research Institute, a private research center Columbia helped establish when it closed the applied sciences-oriented Electronic Research Laboratory. Still a Riverside Drive resident, Alton denied having any part in the contractual arrangements that established the study. He termed the project "a job we did of which we were proud." He would not comment on his relationship to the CIA.

Using the Office of Naval Research as a funding conduit, the CIA supported the doctoral research of five Teachers College (TC) students in 1957 and 1958. A sixth participant in the "Study of Patterns Which Have Characterized Major Scientific Breakthroughs of the Twentieth Century" was Robert Scidmore, CIA project manager for the study and an employee of the Agency's Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI). Scidmore was registered as a non-resident graduate student and apparently received a Ph.D. for his efforts on the project.

The study, subject of a \$24,000 contract between TC and the CIA, resulted not only in a published dissertation, but in an internal classified CIA report by Scidmore on the possible applications of the research findings. The Columbia study was part of a larger OSI investigation of "Current Soviet Scientific Activities Indicative of a Possible Technological Breakthrough."

A TC professor, Frederick Fitzpatrick, secured the CIA funding after the Agency issued an open invitation for research proposals, according to OSI documents. CIA support of the project was classified. The five doctoral

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students given \$4,000 fellowships by the project were told it was supported by the Office of Naval Research, one of them, Herbert Stewart, now professor of science education at Florida Atlantic University, recalled.

The CIA retained "final control" of the selection of researchers for the project, the documents state. University rules now prohibit contractors' interference in the selection of research staffs.

Faculty members were also told by Fitzpatrick (who died in 1976) that the funding came from ONR, said Willard Jacobson, professor of natural sciences and friend of Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick had been a naval commander in World War II and "maintained close contacts to the Navy," Jacobson said.

Lawrence Cremin, president of TC, was a faculty member in the '50's, but said through a spokesman he was unaware of CIA support of Fitzpatrick's project. The study was considered part of TC's Science Manpower Project, a program headed by Fitzpatrick for improving the teaching of science in secondary schools.

Other projects at Columbia were under less direct Agency control. One, mentioned briefly in a 1963 document, involved "work" on "69 Hungarian refugees" at Columbia's Neuropsychiatric Institute by a College of Physicians and Surgeons staff member.

The study was financed by the Human Ecology Fund, which in 1977 was revealed to have been a CIA-created foundation. The fund, which earlier was called the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, was used as a funding conduit for much of the CIA's \$25 million "MK-ULTRA" mind-control research program. MK-ULTRA researchers studied the effects of mind-altering drugs on unwitting students, inmates and others.

The CIA had informed President McGill in 1977 that two MK-ULTRA studies were performed at Columbia in the '50s. McGill later reported that William Thetford, a professor of medical psychology, had undertaken Human Ecology-funded studies in the theory of human behavior. The research did not involve drugs.

McGill said last week he had no knowledge of a study of Hungarian refugees but that he suspected the research was "more sophisticated" than Thetford's. Edward Sachar, director of the Neuropsychiatric Institute and chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, said yesterday he would initiate an investigation to determine the content of the research and name of the researcher.

"I thought that the Institute hadn't been involved with the CIA after the early '50s," Sachar said. He later added, "My heart sinks." The documents also reveal an MK-ULTRA project at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, N.J. ETS, the testing service which creates the SAT and other examinations, had previously acknowledged that seven Human Ecology-funded studies of the relation of personality to test scores had been traced to the CIA. But a spokesman said ETS was unaware that the research by E.A. Saunders, a psychologist, was MK-ULTRA subproject 77.

A different sort of front was used by the CIA for its sponsorship in 1952 of a \$40,000 project for what the documents term "research and planning preparatory to the compilation of a new Russian-English Scientific Dictionary."

The project, which also produced brief mathematical and metallurgical lexicons, was funded "through the National Science Foundation," (NSF) according to the documents. NSF had been created in the early '50s as the Government's mechanism for funding basic scientific research. It remains one of the major financiers of such studies.

While NSF, according to spokesmen in Washington, scrupulously avoids any involvement in classified research, it agreed to administer the dictionary project for OSI. The relationship between the two agencies was designated "Confidential," the CIA's least rigorous security classification. The agreement was accepted by NSF's founding director, Alan Waterman.

Other documents reveal the CIA maintained contacts in the '50s with the independent National Academy of Sciences. Administrators in the two agencies apparently sought to avoid duplicating research efforts by clearing their plans with each other.

Other items disclosed by the documents include:

- Columbia's War Documentation Project, headquartered in Alexandria, VA., in the early '50s was "of common concern to the State Department, the USIA (United States Information Agency) and CIA" and was funded by the CIA in 1954. The previous sponsor was the Air Force.

The Project involved "research studies based on captured German and Russian documents" dealing especially with "Soviet psychological warfare and counter-psychological warfare." The Project was administered by Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR), headed by BASR Director Charles Glock and classified "Confidential."

- CIA employees have attended classes—mostly graduate level—at the university. A roster of the employees and the studies they undertook is in CIA files but was denied to Spectator. Lee Strickland, CIA assistant general counsel, explained in a letter that federal law prohibits the Agency from revealing such information. The CIA would not say what years the roster covers.

- At one point, Columbia invited CIA employees to enter a special program in the Russian Institute. In 1951, Institute Director Geroid Robinson wrote to General George Bedell Smith, director of the CIA, suggesting that 50 CIA, armed forces and foreign service officers enroll in a one-year "comprehensive training program . . . in the Russian area."

A response from the CIA indicated interest in the proposal, but no additional correspondence on the subject seems to exist. Strickland speculated, "it seems quite possible that some CIA employees attended the program in 1951-52 or thereafter." But he said such records would only be filed under employees names and thus "are simply not recoverable."

CONFIDENTIALITY NO. 0520
 DATE RECD. NO. 5/13/68
 IMPUTATION NO. 5/13/68
 INFORMATION NO. 5/13/68

PROCUREMENT JUSTIN
 SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

AMOUNT \$60,000.00
 AUTHORIZED YES
 AUTHORIZED YES
 APPROVED YES
 ENDORSEMENTS 5/13/68
 DATE 5/13/68
 BY 5/13/68
 FOR 5/13/68

A PRODUCT OF SECURITY
 AGENCY'S STATEMENT
 FROM 31 May 1968 to 31 May 1969
 CONTRACT NO. XC-2958
 THE TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA
 UNIVERSITY
 IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
 NEW YORK, NEW YORK

CONFIDENTIAL
 SECURITY CLASS. 1
 CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

SUBJECT: Contract No. XC-2958, Task Order No. 1
 Contract No. XC-2521, Task Order No. 1
 Columbia University

1. The undersigned this date received a telephone call from [redacted] Chief, [redacted] who is also p[er]sonnel officer of the subject Contracts. [redacted] advised that he had word from his contact at Columbia University yesterday that the University "wanted out" of its Contracts with this Agency at the earliest possible time; that this desire on the part of the University to sever its relations with the Agency was based on recent student demonstrations on campus of Columbia University.

2. Task Order No. 1 of Contract No. XC-2521 with its amended totals \$510,000.00 and has a completion date of 31 December 1968. Order No. 1 of Contract No. XC-2958 is funded with \$125,000.00 and expiration date of 31 August 1969. According to [redacted] there are approximately \$200,000.00 unexpended under these combined Contracts.

3. [redacted] Further advised that he had in mind another [redacted] namely, [redacted] to carry on the work should have to terminate the above two Contracts with Columbia University stated that the [redacted] is his feeling that [redacted] is qualified to perform the studies for the Agency and would be willing to do so. Mr. [redacted] stated that he currently has \$125,000.00 of FY 68 funds available to get a contract in being with a new contractor—with an additional \$125,000.00 of FY 69 funds programmed for future obligation.

As far as the Procurement Division is concerned, no previous action is contemplated under either of the subject Contracts until time as the Agency may receive formal request from Columbia University for termination action. In the event that future procurement with the [redacted] is indicated, it will be necessary to conduct a facilities survey.

CIA documents
 finally out from under wraps